

*Families, Friends, Faculty, Staff, and the Class of 2017,*

It was 1 o'clock in the morning and I was halfway through the first shift of my Independent Senior Project. Though I accidentally showed up to the hospital 12 hours early, unsure if the start time was in AM or PM, I couldn't have been more excited to be shadowing an ER doctor and to be thrown into the world of patients, ailments, and late hours. As Dr. Becker examined his patient's EKG, I inquired, "Dr. Becker... his QRS complex and T-wave look shorter than normal. Do you think he's tachycardic?" Dr. Becker's mouth dropped. **PAUSE!** "Mira, how in the world do you know how to read an EKG?" I smiled and explained that I had studied them earlier this year in *Anatomy and Physiology*. (Thank you, Quis!) **PAUSE!** "What school do you go to again?" he asked. "Garrison Forest." I responded. "That must be one heck of a place." I gleefully nodded.

He couldn't have been more right—Garrison Forest is a school that turns incredible opportunities into realities for its students. The Class of 2017 demonstrates this beautifully—with 58 awesome, determined, and talented individuals in our class, I want to share some of the amazing feats we've accomplished and opportunities we've taken on with style and grace.

Take Mia Shparaga, for example, who seamlessly balances her demanding course load with her other talent—competing internationally as a **rhythmic**

**gymnast. PAUSE!** Then there is Ali Baratta, who, after years of study, completed AP Chinese, then, for her ISP, traveled to China to volunteer at a school for kids with cerebral palsy. **PAUSE!** We have students like Kayla Boswell, who at 17, was one of the youngest attendees at the prestigious American Society for Microbiology conference after discovering antibiotic-producing bacteria in Doctor Blair's class.

Outside of the scientific field, our classmates also bring their Garrison spirit onto the athletic field, like Nicole Legar, who traveled to Florida alongside her Varsity lacrosse team to compete against schools from all over the country.

**PAUSE!** Garrison is home to young women who combine their passions and hobbies seamlessly, like Lindsey Bulls, who spent half her junior year on the Varsity lacrosse field and the other half in a Johns Hopkins chemistry lab, through our Women in Science and Engineering program. **PAUSE!** Our class possesses an awesome array of talents. For example, Hyejun Bae not only plays the guitar, piano, and drums, she also composes her own music, and, in addition, is one of our **badminton** stars. **PAUSE!** Some Garrison girls stay close to home, while others travel the world, but near or far, the Class of 2017 amazes me every day.

Garrison has offered us a wide variety of classes, chances to travel, strategies to find our balance, and opportunities to make our mark. What makes all these things possible? **PAUSE!** The people who work hard everyday to make this

community special. They are the gems that make this place sparkle. **PAUSE!** The ones who make us want to scream at the top of our lungs for our Light Blue and Dark Blue spirit teams, make sleepy Upper Schoolers wake up at 7 AM on a Saturday morning to volunteer at food kitchen, and allow our diverse, vibrant group of individuals from Montana to Mexico, from **Southern Maryland to South Korea**, to thrive.

**As someone who came into GFS later in the game**, I am endlessly grateful for how warm and welcoming the Garrison Class of 2017 has been. **PAUSE!** From day one, where Maggie and Claire helped move my heavy boxes into Senior House, I felt instantly welcomed. Whether it was Vasi keeping classes fresh with her hilarious puns, Lily running the musicals from behind the curtains, Jessica and Hanwen astounding us with their artistic talent, Jaida Maller and Emily planning an incredible prom, Ryley Young dazzling us with her dance skills, or Sam impressing us all with her 1,000 points in basketball, the Class of 2017 is funny, talented, energetic, compassionate... and about to venture into the world to continue doing remarkable things.

Whether the Forest has been your home for a shorter time or for your entire life, our class knows who we are as individuals and who we are collectively. Equipped with this knowledge, these experiences, and our support systems, we are

now at a huge crossroads. **PAUSE!** It is a difficult transition, leaving all that we know and love behind, but we are well-prepared for the next chapter.

And, thanks to Garrison, we are prepared to step up to the next set of challenges and move into the next set of opportunities.

It has been an honor and a privilege to be a member of the Class of 2017. I know that I speak for all of us when I say that we are unbelievably grateful to be here on this stage today, surrounded by so many people who love us, graduating from this amazing school. **PAUSE!** I can also say that behind every single senior is an entire village of family, friends, teachers, and cheerleaders who have made this journey possible.

On behalf of the senior class, thank you for those late night pep talks, the early morning breakfasts, the meetings after school to review our math tests and essays, the phone calls checking-in from halfway across the country or world, and for travelling and clearing your schedule to be here today. **PAUSE!** You have guided us through our journeys, supported us through every high and low, and shaped us into the strong, competent young women we are today. Without you, we wouldn't be up here, proudly sporting our Ragged Robins and our Class Rings.

Garrison Forest is a hub for the curious, a place to test the limits, but still reach the sky. Where open-mindedness and curiosity is the norm, and where learning to compromise and listen is a daily lesson in the dorms and hallways alike.

The Forest is home to the most genuine, loving, and unusual friendships, as well as the most valued and celebrated traditions. Where academic and extracurricular endeavors empower us, fill us with passion, and give us the perspective and tools we need to navigate the outside world. This is a community where we become instant friends with visiting alums simply because of our common love and connection.

As excited as we are for the next phase, I know I speak for all of us when I say we are nervous about leaving. The future is uncertain and the world is big, **PAUSE!** but we know that Garrison has prepared us to be courageous, curious, spirited, open-minded, engaged... and just a little bit silly. We may not get to see our best friends and favorite teachers every day or casually walk around this beautiful, peaceful campus, but we still have our connections, our memories, and our **Class Rings** to serve as an anchor as we move into the next chapter.

Thank you for everything, Garrison, and a huge congratulations to the Class of 2017. Along with all our teachers, families, and friends, I can't wait to see what we accomplish.